# Gaza's children face genetic disaster as war-induced starvation and trauma trigger epigenetic damage across generations, scientists warn

10/08/2025 // Cassie B. // **730** Views

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- War trauma and starvation are altering Gazan children's genes.
- This epigenetic damage will cause generational health crises.
- The biological harm exceeds that of historical famines and genocides.
- Both maternal and paternal trauma are impacting future offspring.
- Only ending the war can stop this genetic disaster.

The children of Gaza are facing a silent, biological time bomb. Beyond the immediate horrors of war and starvation, scientists warn that the trauma and malnutrition inflicted upon them are causing epigenetic changes that could damage their health for generations to come. This is not just a humanitarian crisis; it is a genetic disaster in the making, with the health of future Palestinian generations hanging in the balance.

Researchers are drawing direct parallels to historical atrocities, where the scars of famine and genocide were found to be biologically embedded in survivors and their offspring. The mechanism at play is epigenetics, a process where environmental factors like extreme stress and malnutrition cause chemical modifications to DNA. These changes do not alter the

genetic code itself but dramatically affect how genes are expressed, effectively turning them on or off.

## Lessons from history: Famine and genocide leave biological scars

The evidence from past tragedies is chilling. Professor Tessa Roseboom, a biologist at the University of Amsterdam who studied the Dutch Hunger Winter of 1944-45, stated, "Studies show that stress hormones in the mothers affect the babies' bodies and brains." Her research found that children born to pregnant women exposed to that famine faced higher risks of serious health problems later in life, a clear example of epigenetic inheritance.

The impact is not limited to maternal trauma. "We've also studied how fathers living in unsafe, stressful, and malnourished conditions affect their babies," Roseboom added. This double impact is now unfolding in Gaza, where conditions are creating a perfect storm for profound epigenetic harm.

The situation in Gaza is so severe that experts believe the damage may exceed that observed in previous historical cases. Dr. Leon Mutesa, a researcher at the University of Rwanda who studies the epigenetic legacy of the 1994 genocide, sees a direct correlation. "Today in Gaza, we already see symptoms: fear, stress, and high cholesterol levels - all early indicators of coming epigenetic changes, similar to what we observed in Rwanda," Mutesa told *Middle East Eye*.

He explained that in Rwanda, children born during the genocide carried the weight of their mothers' trauma, manifested in depression, anxiety, and other psychiatric disorders. "In war zones like Gaza, the impact is doubled. Additional layers of suffering, starvation, displacement, and ongoing violence compound collective trauma. These conditions leave even deeper negative epigenetic marks," he added.

The statistics on the ground are staggering. According to reports, at least 20,000 children have been killed since the war began. In August alone, 12,800 children were identified as acutely malnourished. Each of these malnourished and traumatized children is a potential carrier of epigenetic alterations.

Professor Hassan Khatib, an epigenetics expert at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, stated: "There is no doubt that a genetic disaster awaits the people of Gaza, especially pregnant women and adolescent boys during puberty, a critical stage in which sperm is formed," he warned. He noted that recent studies on sheep showed a father's diet can affect traits like muscle growth and disease risk, with effects passed down for two generations.

## The biological toll on Gaza's next generation

The case of 22-month-old Rewan Aldreini illustrates the looming crisis. Suffering from severe malnutrition, a weak immune system, and heart problems, her health is deteriorating under what her father calls "engineered starvation." Specialists who reviewed her case concluded she faces a significantly heightened risk of serious health complications due to epigenetic impacts. "It's clear this child isn't receiving the essential nutrients needed for her development," said Professor Roseboom. "That will likely affect her metabolism and leave her vulnerable to diabetes or heart disease."

Dr. Mutesa agreed. "Rewan's genes are being altered by war and starvation. She and her future children will suffer as a result," he warned.

Studies point to one clear solution for the looming crisis: "Stop the war," Mutesa said. Research also shows that positive changes, safe living conditions, access to food, healthcare, and support can help repair some of the damage.

The international community is now faced with a sobering reality. The conflict in Gaza is not only destroying lives today but is also programming a legacy of disease and suffering that could echo through Palestinian families for decades. As Rewan's father, Mohamed Aldreini, dares to dream of an end to the genocide and a return to a "normal life - as human beings," science confirms that time is running out to prevent a biological catastrophe that will outlast any ceasefire.

**Sources for this article include:**

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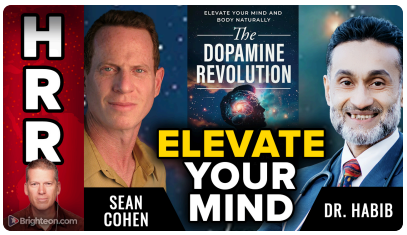


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